

News from the farmers' protest in Washington is beginning to subside. The last shots on T.V. showed the tractor jockeys out helping clean away a big snow. No policemen were swinging billy clubs in the scenes, so I guess part of ill will from the march has been diverted to snow plowing instead of fighting.

Like all herders, I've had a personal interest settlement of the disturbance. As fast as the woolie and hollow horn society uses grain and hay, having even a portion of our suppliers off risking cracked skulls or tear gas pneumonia caused a genuine fear.

One of our sons goes to law school in Washington. After the Christmas holidays, he was assigned to defend some of the anti-China Taiwan demonstrators. I wrote him by immediate post to drop those clients in favor of being ready to spring any firebrand corn or alfalfa farmer who'd been put in jail. Probating the sentence of every refugee or citizen in or off the island of Taiwan wouldn't feed one Texas cow. That is, unless the old cows were so hungry that they'd eat straw sandals made in the Orient. I didn't want him sapping his energy and talents defending foreign rabble rousers when it sounded like the domestic league was going to need some help.

The farmers started out on the wrong path in my opinion. In the first flush of the formation of the tractorcade, I was slogans on the photogenic side of the tractors proclaiming "save the family farm."

We've known in the Shortgrass Country for over 40 years that agriculture was no place for a family man. Our game is for bachelors or old maids. One man and one ranch can't support, say, one wife, three kids, and 250 English bred beef cows, to save their lives.

On a right tight draw, a rancher might feed the cows and steal enough milk to feed a lightweight kid on a bottle. In a real good year it's possible that he could help a nephew through barber's college, or a niece part way through a beauty school. But as far as having a family and a ranch, that's as unlikely as having a race horse and a savings account at the same time.

The only reason Child Who Sits in the Sun and myself were able to raise eight children was a quirk in the weather cycle. About the time ours came along, winters in the Shortgrass Country were warm and the summers were mild and comfortable. Due to the stable temperature our pack never did develop big appetites or need many clothes. Go on and laugh at the story, if you like.

I can't help wondering what those old boys are going to think about once they start riding their tractors back home. The miles are going to stretch out as they go along thinking of the reception they got in Washington and dreading the reception they are going to get from their wives back home.

The nearest comparison I can imagine is the way it feels in the spring to be the only one hauling hay from San Angelo to the ranch. It's a mighty lonesome sensation to be poking along in an old pickup, watching the Lincolns and Eldorados burning the tar. Seems like everybody's cherry tree is blooming but yours. I'd suspect that driving a John Deere from D. C. to Midwest might have the same effect.

It'll be a sorry trick on us herders if we have to use Mexican velvet beans for feed next winter. Lots of folks need to realize how important the farmers are. I just hope they get rested up in time to plant.